

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES and FUNCTIONS of a MUNICIPAL CLERK

Village of Tequesta

1/13/2014

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MUNICIPAL CLERK DETAIL

Many ask **what is the City Clerk?** What is their role in local government?

The Municipal Clerk (also called city clerk, village clerk, or town clerk) is the oldest of public servants, along with the tax collector, and traces back to before Biblical times. Clerks, in the early years, were often called “Remembrancers,” as before writing tools were available, the Remembrancer had to solely utilize their memory as the public record (www.sanantonio.gov). The term Clerk in America is traced to the early Colonists first order of business, where they established the office of the “Clerk.” According to a 1989 study by J. Walton Blackburn, titled **Review of Public Personnel Administration**, “One of the most important, yet little recognized, category of public servants in the US today is that of a municipal clerk.” While a major function of the City Clerk is the official custodian of records, we are exponentially more than “just a clerk.”

We ARE Municipal Clerks

We are diverse leaders, dedicated **high-level professionals**, and often serve on our senior management team. The position requires distinguishing qualities and attributes that are atypical of the standard employee. The Clerk provides an unwavering dedication to organization, education and personal success in a highly charged and stressful environment. Management and Council expectations and demands are abundant based on the advanced complexity of issues involving the position. The expectations can at times be inexhaustible - placing significant stressors on the mind and body.

The Clerk commands remarkable memory capabilities and can recall instantly **exact and concise** communications from prior years. When recollecting past discussions and actions, as the city scribe, the Clerk possesses factual knowledge from memory. It is imperative the Clerk has exceptional perception, judgment, and reasoning when retaining and recalling official actions and discussions. The Clerk must juggle copious responsibilities simultaneously; have considerable proficiency and strict attention to detail, exemplary organization skills, and the dexterity to coordinate unforeseen and never-ending changes. Clerks are inevitably exact, yet flexible, with timelines, and balance interactions positively yet with a confident and impartial demeanor.

Municipal Clerks are the **hub of local government** – the **direct link** between the residents of their community and their government. Clerks are generally Charter Officers, alongside the attorney and manager, and are the “nucleus” of municipal activities. We have significant interactions with every department, neighboring community leaders, and legislators, so we are invariably involved in all aspects of government – local, county, state, and federal.

Our responsibilities and obligations are extensive and comprehensive, and vary greatly based on the municipality. The Clerk handles impossible situations while providing constructive solutions. The Clerk functions much like the Secretary of State – serving

as policy and legislative advisors; and acting as liaison between staff, management, and Council. They act as the channel of communication between residents and government; and are responsible for the legislative operations of the city, with complete signature authority over official documents in which an official seal and signature are required. The complexities of the job are far greater than most city positions as the Clerk is profoundly involved with the day-to-day operations, dealing with assorted personalities and an unyielding array of tasks. The Clerk is apolitical and works to please everyone (elected body, Manager, department heads, residents, etc).

Due the recent economic decline, smaller to mid-size municipalities now utilize the Clerk in dual roles. In Florida alone we can serve as public information officers (77 cities), human resource managers (77), webmasters (73), business tax specialists (88), cemetery managers (63), internal auditors (22), and finance directors (49). These additional non-related functions are placed on the Clerk due to their vast knowledge, connections and relations with the public and employees. These added responsibilities have certainly added numerous (unpaid) hours to their workweek – often with limited or no additional staffing.

Here in the Village of Tequesta, the Clerk serves as Public Information Officer (PIO) and Webmaster. As PIO, the position is tasked with maintaining strong relationships with the local media, ensuring accurate and timely information is disseminated via press releases, remaining knowledgeable and up to date on social media outlets, and produces effective graphic design publications. Additionally, the Clerk is tasked with ensuring proper emergency notification processes are in place and executes and the NIMS (National Incident Management System) Joint Information Center (JIC) during emergency situations. The position of Webmaster includes maintaining and administering the entire contents of the Village's webpage. This in and of itself takes numerous hours to ensure accuracy, innovative and on topic content with a pioneering original design.

However, in all cities, the Clerk interacts with concerned residents who may just need advice, staff who wait until the last minute, management who believe their issues are priority, and angry residents who want answers – *now*. The Clerk delicately and respectfully balances each customer, both internally and externally. This could not be more evident than in election management. Municipal Clerks serve as the supervisors for highly charged city elections, making them a listening board for potential issues in which they must remain impartial yet considerate. The Clerk works with stringent legally binding state statutes that – simply put – ***are mind bending***.

The Clerk is one of, if not, the most effective and efficient organizer/planner on any municipal staff. They are engaged, knowledgeable and valued members of their local governmental communities. Clerks are experts in public policy, legislative actions, and laws regarding public records, election, notary and sunshine. We are experts in records management, social media and technological trends, community outreach, meeting management, project management and public record requests. Municipal Clerks attend all regular council meetings, workshops, special meetings, and sometimes the various

board and committee meetings. These meetings are generally after hours, and therefore, add a great deal of work hours to most weeks.

We are creative and technical writers; facilitating binding legal documents including ordinances (laws), resolutions (policies), grants, agreements, minutes, final orders, deeds, Code of Ordinances and the Charter. Clerks are customer service specialists and legal advertising professionals who must maintain stringent time lines for legally binding advertisements. Clerks are the official custodian of records and ensure the municipal records are disposed of and/or maintained according to law. Clerks are skilled in procurement, budgeting, ethics, and serve as trainers. More importantly, they are tasked with solving complex and multi-faceted issues.

The Clerk is the **historian – the permanent voice of the community**. In some municipalities, the Clerk serves as interim city manager, and / or transitions directly into the assistant manager or manager position. City clerk's organize and facilitate the elaborate council agenda packets, which consist of departmentally interconnected and detailed documents. Following the meeting, the minutes are scribed with deliberate caution to ensure an accurate transcript of legislative action is maintained.

The extreme pressure experienced with the position can attributed to the elevated political environment, management demands and council expectations. Additional job stressors can include many lengthy after hour meetings, contentious elections and controversial council meetings. Additionally, the added duties and responsibilities placed on the office with limited staffing, adds a new layer of pressure, which is likened to a string being pulled at full force that is starting to fray.

Clerks are educated workers who often possess a Bachelor or Masters degree and have achieved the well-respected CMC (certified municipal clerk) or MMC (master municipal clerk) designations as conferred by the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. CMC requires at least 120 hours of job specific training and at least two years of clerk experience; and the MMC certification requires a previous CMC designation, 120 hours of advanced curriculum, 40 hours of professional or charitable work, and takes approximately 6 years to obtain.

In closing, the position is comprehensive and when the correct individual serves as Clerk, the operation is smooth, effective, open and on the leading edge of local government.

The eminent political scientist, Professor William Bennett Munro, writing in one of the first textbooks on municipal administration stated:

"No other office in municipal service has so many contacts. It serves the mayor, the city council, the city manager, and all administrative departments without exception."

All of them call upon it, almost daily, for some service or information. Its work is not spectacular, but it demands versatility, alertness, accuracy, and no end of patience.

The public does not realize how many loose ends of city administration this office pulls together.”

These words, written over 50 years ago, are even more appropriate and pertinent today.